

# THE ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' ERRORS IN PRONOUNCING ENGLISH WORDS

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## Abstract

This research was intended at analyzing of students errors in pronouncing English words at SMAN 1 Parigi Tengah, and finding the most problematic tense-lax sound for the students and factors made them could not produce words correctly. In this research, the researcher did not apply any method. It is called descriptive research. The population of this research was all member of class IX B at SMAN 1 Parigi Tengah consisting of 25 students. The instruments of this research were oral test and interview. The researcher found that the most problematic sound for the students was /ɜ:/. The students' errors in producing this sound was 96% in initial and final position while in medial position all of them could not produce this sound correctly. It was caused by two factors, namely internal and external factor.

**Keywords:** error analysis; error; pronunciation; tense-lax sounds; factors of errors.

## INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia. Thus, students only get English at school. It makes them get difficulties when learning this language. As a result, students do mistakes and errors in learning this language both of skills and components. Language has four skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing, and three components: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

As one of language components, pronunciation needs to be known by the students but, the reality, Indonesian learners could not produce English words correctly. They get confused when producing English words. It is because there are differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English. The first is differences in the number of vowel sounds. Bahasa Indonesia have six vowel sounds namely /i/, /u/, /o/, /a/, /e/, and /ə/ while English has twelve vowel sounds; /i:/, /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ɒ/, /ɔ:/, /ʊ/, /u:/, /ɜ:/, and /ə/. The second is English is known as inconsistent language. For example words *good* this word should be pronounced as /ɡʊd/. Contrary, Bahasa Indonesia is consistent language. The way words were spelling is the way to be pronounced. For example *tadi* it should be pronounced /tadi/. In addition, English has tense and lax sound while Bahasa Indonesia does not. Tense sounds are sounds which are produced when the tongue is positioned the center of the mouth, thus

requiring more muscular tension to reach and maintain these positions while lax sounds are sounds which produced when the tension is relaxed a little, the tongue moves toward a more central position in the mouth (Lane:2010).

In relation to the problems above, Indonesian learners make error in producing English sounds as Djajaningrat (2011) states, “As consequence of all the difficulties provided by the English pronunciation, many English language learners as well as the Indonesian learners tend to generate errors in the articulation of the sounds”. The problems faced by the students are caused by two sources of errors. According to Richard (1971) errors are caused by negative transfer or the effect of his/her mother tongue, which are called inter-language errors. Besides that the students do not know the target language well, this sentence belongs to intra-lingual errors.

Beside the sources of errors above, the learners make errors caused by two factors. They are internal and external factors. Internal factor refers to the students’ motivation in learning English while the external factor refers to the environment of the learner. According to Sari (n.d), internal factors refer to the factors inside the students themselves which play an important role in learning English while external factors are the factors outside the students that influence them in learning English. They are time, frequency of the learners’ contact with the language, and number of students in the classroom.

Related to the explanation above, the researcher chose SMAN 1 Parigi Tengah since the students did not have good ability in pronunciation. They got confused to produce English words. In this research, the researcher formulated her research questions as follow:

1. What is the most problematic tense lax vowel sound to pronounce?
2. What factors cause students produce errors in pronouncing English tense lax sounds?

Based on the problem statement above, the objectives of this research were to find out the most problematic tense-lax sound for the students and the factors which made them do errors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researcher used descriptive research design that was conducted through analyzing students’ errors in pronunciation. In general, the goal of this research is describing the students’ ability in pronunciation including the factors which make them doing errors. The participant of this research was the students of class XB at SMAN 1 Parigi Tengah. The total number of the student in this class was 25.

To get the data, the researcher used two instruments. They were test and interview. The main instrument of this study was test. She gave 20 words for the students. Then, students produced the words. Next, she recorded the students' pronunciation. After that, she analyzed the data. Then, she interviews the students and the teacher to know the students' factors.

The test was analyzed by using formula as stated by Sudjono (1989: 79)::

$$P = \frac{Fq}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

P = % of students' error

Fq= frequency of incorrect answers

N = number of students

To know the students' error, the researcher classified the difficulties based on standard which had proposed by Depdikbud (1993:37) as follows:

- a. 65%-100% is classified as high
- b. 36%-64% is classified as moderate
- c. 0%-35% is classified as low.

By using the standard above, the researcher identified the difficulties or the error of students in pronouncing tense-lax vowel sounds.

## FINDING

To know the students' ability in pronunciation, the researcher gave 20 words to the students, and then she calculated the students' errors. Table below is the result.

**Table 1**  
Sound /i:/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
1	Correct	6	24%
	Incorrect	19	76%
Total		25	100%

Test number one was sound /i:/ in initial position. In this test, more than half students were incorrect to produce this sound, while a few of them could produce this sound appropriately.

**Table 2**  
Sound /i:/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
2	Correct	13	52%
	Incorrect	12	48%
Total		25	100%

Test number two was sound /i:/ which occurred in medial position. Nearly half of students could not produce this sound correctly, while others were correct in pronouncing this sound.

**Table 3**  
Sound /i:/ in final position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
3	Correct	22	88%
	Incorrect	3	12%
Total		25	100%

Test number three was sound /i:/ which was located in final position. In this part, there were most of students who could produce this sound correctly, while the rest was incorrectly.

**Table 4**  
Sound /ɪ/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
4	Correct	14	56%
	Incorrect	11	44%
Total		25	100%

Test number four was sound /ɪ/ which was placed in initial position. Errors were produced by the students in pronouncing this sound which was more than 40%, while the others were incorrect.

**Table 5**  
Sound /ɪ/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
5	Correct	21	84%
	Incorrect	4	16%
Total		25	100%

Test number five was sound /ɪ/ in medial position. In this number, most of students were incorrect in producing this sound while few of them were incorrect.

**Table 6**  
Sound /ɪ/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
6	Correct	18	72%
	Incorrect	7	28%
Total		25	100%

Test number six was sound /ʊ/ which occurred in medial position. There were more than half of students who could produce this sound properly, while the others could not produce this sound correctly.

**Table 7**  
Sound /ʊ/ in final position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
7	Correct	20	80%
	Incorrect	5	20%
Total		25	100%

Test number seven was sound /ʊ/ which is placed in final position. Only few of them could not pronounce this sound correctly, while most of them understand how to produce this sound appropriately.

**Table 8**  
Sound /u:/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
8	Correct	2	8%
	Incorrect	23	92%
Total		25	100%

Test number eight was sound /u:/ which was placed in initial position. Only two students could produce this sound correctly. Most of them could not pronounce this sound properly.

**Table 9**  
Sound /u:/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
9	Correct	15	60%
	Incorrect	10	40%
Total		25	100%

Test number nine was sound /u:/ which occurred in medial position. More than half of students could produce this sound correctly, while the others did not comprehend how to produce this sound appropriately.

**Table 10**  
Sound /u:/ in final position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
10	Correct	21	84%
	Incorrect	4	16%
Total		25	100%

Test number ten was sound /u:/ which was placed in final position. Most of students could pronounce this sound correctly. Only few of them did not know how to produce this sound correctly.

**Table 11**  
Sound /e/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
11	Correct	14	56%
	Incorrect	11	44%
Total		25	100%

Test number eleven was sound /e/ in initial position. More than half of students were right in pronouncing this sound, whereas the others did error.

**Table 12**  
Sound /e/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
12	Correct	16	64%
	Incorrect	9	36%
Total		25	100%

Test number twelve was sound /e/ which occurred in medial position. More than half of students could pronounce this sound properly, while the others did error in pronouncing this sound.

**Table 13**  
Sound /ɜ:/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
13	Correct	1	4%
	Incorrect	24	96%
Total		25	100%

Test number thirteen was sound /3:/ in initial position. The students got confused in pronouncing this sound, most of them produce this sound incorrectly.

**Table 14**  
Sound /3:/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
14	Correct	0	-
	Incorrect	25	100%
Total		25	100%

Test number fourteen was sound /3:/ which was placed in medial position. The students did not have good ability in pronouncing this sound. All of them could not pronounce this sound appropriately.

**Table 15**  
Sound /3:/ in final position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
15	Correct	1	4 %
	Incorrect	24	96 %
Total		25	100%

Test number fifteen was sound /3:/ which occurred in final position. Most of students did error in pronouncing this sound. They did not know the rule to do it. Only one student could produce this sound correctly.

**Table 16**  
Sound /ɔ:/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
16	Correct	14	56%
	Incorrect	11	44%
Total		25	100%

Test number sixteen was sound /ɔ:/ which was located in initial position. More than half of students understand how to pronounce this sound correctly, whereas the others got confused to produce this sound.

**Table 17**  
Sound /ɔ:/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
17	Correct	4	16%
	Incorrect	21	84%
Total		25	100%

Test number seventeen was sound /ɔ:/ in medial position. The table above described that most of students did errors in pronouncing this sound. They did not comprehend to do it, while the others could produce this sound correctly.

**Table 18**  
Sound /ɔ:/ in final position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
18	Correct	2	8%
	Incorrect	23	92%
Total		25	100%

Test number eighteen was sound /ɔ:/ in final position. Based on the table above, most of students could not produce this sound correctly. Only two of them were correct in pronouncing this sound.

**Table 19**  
Sound /b/ in initial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
19	Correct	16	64%
	Incorrect	9	36%
Total		25	100%

Next test was sound /b/ which was placed in initial position. The table above showed that more than half of students were correct in pronouncing this sound, while the others did error in pronouncing this sound.

**Table 20**  
Sound /b/ in medial position

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
20	Correct	2	8%
	Incorrect	23	92%
Total		25	100%

Last test was sound /b/ in medial position. Most of students did error in pronouncing this sound. They got confused to pronounce this sound. Only few of them were correct.



**Table 21**  
**Students' Errors**

sound	Errors			total errors
	Position of sounds			
	Initial	Medial	final	
/i:/	19	12	3	34
/ɪ/	11	4	-	15
/ʊ/	-	7	5	12
/u:/	23	10	4	37
/e/	11	9	-	20
/ɜ:/	24	25	24	73
/ɔ:/	11	21	23	55
/ɒ/	9	23	-	32
TOTAL				278

The table above shows that sound /ɜ:/ was the most problematic vowel for the students. Most of students could not produce this sound correctly. The total of students' errors in pronouncing this sound was 73. They pronounced this sound in initial position *earn* as /*earn*/ and /*ern*./ In medial position the word "word" was mostly pronounced as /*wɒr*/ by of all students whereas in final position, the word *her* was dominantly produced as /*her*/.

#### **Result of Interview (students)**

To know the factors of students in producing errors, the researcher interviewed the students. Below is the result.

**Table 22**  
In which class do you study English for the 1<sup>st</sup> time?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
1	Elementary school	11	44%
	Junior High School	14	56%
Total		25	100%

Based on the table above, more than half of students started to learn English in junior high school. Five of them stated that they learned English seriously when they were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Junior High School, while the rest of students argued that they studied English when they were in Elementary school. The rest of students continue to learn English in Senior High School since they have prior knowledge about English.

**Table 23**  
So far, do you think English is difficult?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
2	Yes	25	100
	No	-	-
Total		25	100%

By seeing the table above, we can say that all of students had problems in learning English because all of them considered English as a difficult subject. Therefore, they need to study and to practice English more.

**Table 24**  
What is the most difficult in learning English?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
3	Pronunciation	13	52%
	Vocabulary	11	44%
	Grammar	1	4%
Total		25	100%

The table above showed that pronunciation was the most difficult component in learning English. Students got confused to pronounce English words. On the other hand, grammar is the easiest component in learning English since it is proved by the frequency and the percentage of the table above.

**Table 25**  
How do you solve it?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
4	Opening Dictionary	19	76%
	Opening dictionary, asking the teacher	6	24%
Total		25	100%

In solving their problems, more than half students tried to check the meaning and pronunciation in the dictionary before producing the word, while the rest of the students attempted to look up dictionary and ask the teacher.

**Table 26**  
Do you only practice English in classroom? or also at your home?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
5	At school and home	6	24%
	At school	19	76%
Total		25	100%

In this interview, more than half of students stated that they practiced English only at school, while few of them practiced English at home. Based on this result, we can say that the students did not have good ability in pronouncing English words because they did not practice more or only used English at school.

**Table 27**  
Have you ever joined in English course?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
6	Yes	5	20%
	No	20	80%
Total		25	100%

Based on the table above, only few of students joined in English course while more than 75% students did not join it because English course place was far from their home and the payment was expensive. Therefore, they had low ability in English.

**Table 4.28**  
What is your highest English score?

Item No	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
7	75-84	18	72%
	85-94	6	24%
	95-100	1	4%
Total		25	100%

The table above depicted that more than half students got score over 75, only one student got 95 score, and the rest got more than 85 score.

*RS : Researcher*

***T : Teacher***

*RS: How many times do you teach English to the first year students at class B a week?*

***T: Twice a week***

*RS: What skills do you teach them?*

***T: Four skills. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing***

*RS: What components do you teach them?*

***T: All components. Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.***

*RS: Do you integrate skill and components? What kinds of skill and component do you integrate?*

***T: Yes, I do. Writing and reading-structure and vocabulary, and Listening and speaking-vocabulary and pronunciation.***

*RS: What method or technique do you use to teach them?*

***T: Communicative approach and audio-lingual method.***

*RS: What do you think about your students' ability in pronunciation?*

***T: enough***

*RS: Which one is more difficult between vowel and consonant? Why*

***T: Both Because, they did not practice more.***

*RS: By considering their problem, how do you overcome it?*

***T: Using electronic dictionary.***

*RS: Do you have an opinion about the causes of the errors in pronunciation?*

***T: Yes I do. I think, one of the causes of errors is the influence of mother tongue.***

*RS: So far, you think, Do they know the rule to produce each vowel sounds. Especially tense lax sound?*

***T: No. They do not know the rule to produce tense lax sounds.***

*RS: What do you want your students to do in improving their pronunciation?*

***T: Students should practice English in daily activity possess electronic dictionary, as well as they always watch western film and listen to English song.***

*RS: How is their enthusiastic in learning English?*

***T: In learning English, there are only six students who are active in process of teaching and learning. They ask teacher when they did not understand, they also can answer when I give them question related with the material.***

At this school, there were LCD projector, library, and other devices. The researcher can conclude that the students' errors in pronouncing English words (tense-lax sounds) commonly was caused by internal factor.

## **DISCUSSION**

To answer questions on the problem statement, the researcher provides the discussion below.

### **1. The most problematic tense-lax vowel sound for students**

The researcher found that the most problematic sound was /ɜ:/. In initial and final position, the students did error about 96% (see table 13 and 15), while in medial position they got errors about 100% (see table 14). Thus, the total of students' errors in pronouncing this sound was about 73 errors. The students could not produce sound /ɜ:/ correctly because Bahasa Indonesia does not distinguish tense and lax sounds. Therefore, it was difficult for the students to pronounce this sound.

In relation to the production of sound /ɜ:/, the tongue moves to the back of mouth and it should be little opened while the tongue tip upward without touching anything (Prator and Robinet, 1972). In producing words *earn*, *word* and *her*, most of students pronounced /ear/ or /er/, /wɜr/, and /her/. They produced them based on the spelling. In Bahasa Indonesia, the words are pronounced based on what is written. Moreover, they did not know the rules to pronounce sound /ɜ:/ because Bahasa Indonesia does not have rules to produce tense and lax sound. Praraningrum and Kwary (2006) state that Bahasa Indonesia does not differentiate tense and lax vowel sounds. Therefore, the students got confused to produce these sounds. They did not know the rules to pronounce these sounds.

Thus, it was clear that sound /ɜ:/ was the most problematic sound for the students. Both of the errors' sources (intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors) occurred when they produced words because Bahasa Indonesia influenced students' ability in pronouncing English words as the researcher mention above that students produce words based on the spelling. Sumedi in Santi (2005:2) argues, "Students who learn English, no matter which area they come from, always find difficulties in learning pronunciation since his target language is very different with his mother tongue. It is also the fact that their difficulties are varied from their linguistic background". In addition, Richards (1971) states that the learner of foreign language makes some mistakes in the target language by effecting of his/her mother tongue that is called as **inter-lingual errors**. Besides that, the students did not know the rule in producing this sound. Sanal (n.d) states that student may do errors in the target language, since they do not know the target language. As a consequence, they have difficulties in using it. This is called **intra-lingual errors**.

## **2. Factors caused students produce errors in pronouncing English tense lax sounds**

The second question of this research was about the factors which caused the students doing error. The researcher found that the most dominant factor of students' error was internal factor. They did not have high motivation in learning English. More than half of them learned English subject for the first time in Junior High School. Besides that, few of them learned English seriously when they were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Junior High School. However, they only learned it seriously to face national examination. It means that they only had a little basic knowledge of English. Then, more than half of them did not keep practicing English outside of classroom or in teaching and learning process. Therefore, English was difficult for them and the most difficult component was pronunciation as can be seen in the table 24. This argument was supported by the teacher's statement. He said that students only had enough ability in pronunciation. In addition, to improve students'

pronunciation, many of them only looked up dictionary to know the pronunciation. Next, most of them did not join English course. It means that they only learn English based on the material from school. Furthermore, based on the teacher's answer in interview that only six students were enthusiastic in learning English. It described that only six students had motivation in learning English.

This school had good and useful facilities such as LCD projector, speaker for listening, library, and handout. Moreover, the teacher applied appropriate method (communicative and audio-lingual method) to teach speaking-pronunciation. Therefore, in external factor, the researcher found causes of errors in number of students. In class XB, the total of students was twenty five. It was not affective in teaching and learning process. Jones (2007) states that the ideal size for students in studying language is 12. In crowded classroom, the teachers may not be able to control the class. Thus, teaching and learning English in class XB was not effective because the number of students in this class was more than twenty.

Based on the result and discussion explained above, it was clear that English vowel sounds are difficult for the Indonesian students. As previous researcher, Jumiaty (2006) found that Indonesian students did not have good ability in pronouncing vowel sounds. Thus, she analyzed students' ability in pronouncing four English sounds. They were /ɑ/, /ey/, /æ/, and /ɔ/. In her research, she found that the most difficult vowel for students was sound /ɑ/ (68.6%) but in this study, the researcher found that sound /ɜ:/ was the most problematic vowel sound for the students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

After analyzing the data, the researcher concluded that students did not have good ability in pronouncing tense lax sounds. None could produce all words correctly. Sound /ɜ:/ was the most problematic vowel for them. It is clear on table 13, 14 and 15 which showed that the students' errors in producing this sound were 96% and 100% (classified as high). The students' ability in pronouncing English words was influenced by some causes. First, Bahasa Indonesia does not differentiate tense and lax sound. This is called interlingual errors. Second, students did not know the rule of English vowel pronunciation especially tense-lax sound. It can be said as intralingual errors. Third, students did not have motivation in learning English. They did not learn more about English pronunciation. Most of them did not keep practicing or joining the course. In addition, they only look up dictionary to solve their problems. Therefore, they felt difficult in learning English. It is called internal factor.

Last, the class consisted of twenty five students. It was large class in teaching and learning English process. Therefore, this class was not effective for the students to learn English.

Referring to the conclusions above, the researcher provided some suggestions to reduce the students' problems in pronunciation. First, the students should realize that English and Bahasa Indonesia have different rules in pronunciation. Therefore, they need to practice and to learn more about English. Second, the students also should ask teacher if they did not understand about the material and English pronunciation. Third, the teacher should find other techniques to teach English for the students. Therefore, they understand and have good ability either in skill and English component. Last, for the next researchers, they should use appropriate or interesting technique to improve students' pronunciation.

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